Rev 13:1-10 The First Beast 10-11-15

2 wks ago we saw that the great red dragon, Satan, failed in his mission to destroy the Messiah & he was cast down out of Heaven. Satan is furious because he knows his time is short & now he is making the church his primary target. Satan uses all his power to persecute the church & to try to make her forsake her allegiance to JX. How does he go about doing this? That is what this chapter is all about. Think back to D-Day- June 6, 1944. The Allies invaded Europe on the beaches in Normandy. It proved to be the decisive moment, the determinative battle of WW2. When those beaches were finally taken by the Allies, it became clear that Adolph Hitler, in principle, was a defeated foe; that there was no longer any real question as to which side was going to win.

But, at that particular point, did Hitler run up the white flag & say, "Ok, we're done, let's go home?" No, it was almost a whole year of fierce fighting until VE Day, the day when all German hostilities ceased- May 8, 1945. D-Day began the victory & VE Day completed it. 2 Days. Both vitally essential to a comprehensive victory. D-Day was victory inaugurated & VE Day was victory consummated. & what about the time in between those 2 days? Was it marked by a reduction of hostilities? No, just the opposite. It was characterized by the most violent fighting of the entire war.

This is precisely the situation before us in Rev 13. We find ourselves in betw the 2 days. What has occurred in chap 12 is D-Day, the decisive conflict waged & won. Jesus defeated Satan by His incarnation, sinless life, sacrificial death, & His glorious res & ascension. The Bk of Rev shows us that D-Day has occurred in the 1st coming of X, & because it has, VE Day has been secured & X's final victory will occur at the 2nd Coming of X. John warns us that even though we must face the beast, we do so w/ the certain & final victory yet to come firmly imbedded in our minds.

Now Satan intensifies his efforts to persecute & destroy the church & he uses 2 agents: the beast out of the sea, vss 1-10 (aka as the AntiX); & the beast out of the earth, vss 11-18 (False Prophet). Together, these 3 (Satan, the AntiX, & the False Prophet) form an unholy trinity that seeks to counterfeit the Godhead itself. (insert)

Rev 13 is one of the most interesting passages in all the Bk of Rev. It is also one of the most misinterpreted. Since we are called to face the beast & engage him in spiritual warfare, it behooves us to know all that we can about him. 1st, notice the context: Rev 13:18 tells us that understanding these things correctly, "*calls for wisdom*." This is, in part, a reference to the fact that many in John's original audience were Jews, who were thoroughly familiar w/ the OT. I have no doubt that when they heard the BK of Rev read aloud in the churches, the minds of these Jewish Xans were immediately filled w/ OT texts which provide the context for John's vision & the key to rightly understanding his highly symbolic language. The main question I face as I prepare sermons each week is: "to what OT texts is this chapter referring? Because virtually every paragraph in this vision of the Revelation refers–directly or indirectly–to one or more OT passages. So 1st century Xans who knew the OT understood the big picture of what John was talking about- & so can we!

But John's call for wisdom also entails something else. Not only is the OT the main part of the context, & the key to understanding the symbols that he uses, but John also writes against the backdrop of a very large & very pagan God-hating world empire–Rome, an empire which was also
predicted by the prophet Daniel 600yrs earlier.

So John is also asking his readers to make the connection betw X's fulfillment of these things & how these things are currently being played out before their

very eyes in the Roman Empire. 1st Century Xans could see this in the struggles of the 7 churches to whom John was originally writing.

The historical context is the manifestation of **the beast** in John's day–which was **Imperial Rome**, w/ her emperor cult, & her economic & military domination of the ancient world. In the Book of Rev, then, the Rom Emp itself becomes a symbol of all those God-hating empires throughout history & their self-deifying leaders who follow in her wake. In other words, **the Rom Empire** is **the 1st manifestation of the 4th beast** of Daniel's prophecy in Dan 7, & the Roman Empire is **the beast who comes out of the sea** as described by John & empowered by the Dragon (Satan).

But Rome is also a picture to the saints in subsequent ages of all those satanic kingdoms which will rise again & again until X returns & they will be relentless in waging war on the saints. But the question we face– & for which we must seek God's wisdom to answer correctly– is to identify the manifestation of the beast in our own age, as well as weigh the possibility of whether or not a final beast will arise in the days immediately before X's return, a beast which will make the Roman Empire & its persecution of the church pale by comparison. & that is a question that we cannot fully answer because we do not know the future course of world events & because as Jesus says, no one knows "the day or the hour" of His return.

Revelation does not predict future events w/ the precision we might like. But John does lay out the way in which Satan works & he reminds us of those weapons we must use against him, namely, the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God & prayer as we seek to faithfully proclaim the gospel, which is the power of God for salva.

In Dan 3 we see what it means for the beast of the Babylonian Empire to persecute the people of God, when

we read about 3 young Hebrew men- Shadrach, Meshach, & Abegnego who are cast into a fiery furnace because they refuse to worship the image erected by King Nebuchadnezzar. In this case God chooses to protect them & by God's grace they remain faithful unto death.

Rev 12:17 tells us that the sea is a symbol for the abyss to which Satan has been cast down. As the home of the Dragon, it is also the place that the primarily agent of Satan emerges- the beast. & John says, "*I saw a beast rising out of the sea*," connecting **the beast (Rome**) directly to **the dragon (Satan**). The beast "*had 10 horns & 7 heads, w/ 10 diadems on his horns, & blasphemous names on its heads*." Notice how the beast virtually mirrors the Dragon as John has depicted him in Rev 12:3. The similarity betw these 2 indicates that the beast draws its power directly from Satan & serves as his chief tormentor of X's church. V 2 makes it clear that the beast is a satanically empowered empire, because John connects the beast who rises out of the sea directly to the 4th beast of the vision recorded in the 7th chap of the prophecy of Daniel. Rev 13:2: "*The beast that I saw was like a leopard; its feet were like a bear's & its mouth was like a lion's mouth. & to it the dragon gave his power & his throne & great authority*." In Dan 7:7, the prophet spoke about a 4th beast which was "*terrifying & frightening & very powerful. It had large iron teeth; it crushed & devoured its victims & trampled underfoot whatever was left. It was different from all the former beasts, & it had 10 horns*." John speaks about this same beast in Daniel 7 as a present reality. The letters to the 7 churches in Rev 2-3, tell us that the beast was even then persecuting the Saints. & just like the 4th Beast of Dan 7 which spoke boastful words against God, so too, we learn in Rev 13:5 & 6 that this beast was "*given a mouth to utter haughty & blasphemous words & it was allowed to exercise authority for 42 months*," which, as we have

seen, is the entire period of time between the 1st & 2nd comings of X.

Furthermore, "the beast *opened his mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming His name & His dwelling," (Randy Alcorn- lie- Heaven is boring).* The beast demands to receive worship from the peoples of the earth. In order to deceive the whole world, the beast now imitates the power of God, specifically he imitates the res of JX. In v 3, we read, "One *of its heads seem to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed. & the whole earth marveled as they followed the beast*." The Roman emperor Nero was one of the most notorious & evil figures of the ancient world. At first Nero was indifferent to Xanity, but later on he became violently opposed to the church, & had both the apostles Paul & Peter put to death in Rome, along w/ countless other Xan martyrs. Nero was a vain man, & completely preoccupied w/ personal luxury. He quickly bankrupted the imperial treasury & then confiscated land & property from the nobles so as to continue his spending. He also murdered his pregnant wife. & when he was suspected of starting the horrible fire which for six days burned much of the city of Rome during the summer of 64 A.D., he blamed the Xans in the city for starting the fire & he began to torture Xans & turned many of them into human torches. So Nero was thot to be an embodiment of the AntiX because this is when fierce persecution from Rome against the church begins. Then 4 yrs later Nero goes mad & commits suicide in 68 A.D. The res of the beast must be seen against this historical background of Jn's own age & the deification of the Rom emperor. Rom emperors considered themselves to be divine, & they all demanded worship from their subjects. So our text says that the beast suffered a seemingly mortal wound, only to come back to life again. The historical record is clear that under the rule of emperors Vespasian, Titus & Domitian– the emperors who came after Nero– Rome

regained the power & wealth she had before Nero brought the empire to virtual collapse. A case can be made that when one of the beast's 7 heads was slain (Nero), a series of emperors arose who saw themselves as deities & who demanded all people to call them "my Lord & my God." The fatal wound to the beast was, apparently healed. But this symbolism has a much broader application. The revival of a powerful movement or an institution after serious trouble seems to indicate to its followers that it is invincible. & the Rom Emp seems to survive all threats, & attracts more worship than ever. A counterfeit res, in the sense just described, is one of the tell-tail signs that Satan is at work. Now there is a reversal of Roman prestige & power & we read in v 4, "& they *worshiped the dragon for he had given his authority to the beast, & they worshiped the beast saying, "Who is like the beast? Who can fight against it*?" Imperial Rome had come back from the brink of collapse. Her grandeur was restored. Her military was victorious once again. By worshiping the emperor & the state, men were actually worshiping the Dragon (Satan) who brought up the beast from the sea. This resurrected beast "*was given authority over every tribe & people & language & nation. All who dwell on earth will worship the beast— everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that was slain.*" Those who are not Xan's–those whose names were never written in the book of life–are at the mercy of the Dragon. & he has no mercy! But not only was the beast given authority over the nations, he also appears to be victorious over the Saints. As John warns us in v 7, the beast "*was allowed to make war on the saints & to conquer them*." As we have seen, this refers to those Xans living throughout the Rom Emp, many of whom had their lives taken from them because they refused to worship the beast & his image. It was widely known in John's day that countless Xans lost their lives in Rome for

refusing to renounce their faith in JX & acknowledge Caesar as Lord. But this is not a phenomena limited to ancient Rome & the 1st cen. We have seen how Voices of the Martyrs reports that 150,000 Xans are dying for their faith every year because they refuse to deny their Lord. (More than 400 per day).

The continued activity of the beast thru out this present age is why Jn warns us now, even as he warned his 1st cent hearers, "*He who has an ear, let him hear. If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity he will go. If anyone is to be killed w/ the sword, w/ the sword he will be killed. This calls for patient endurance & faithfulness on the part of the saints*." John can say this w/o despair, because he know how the story ends. Let us never forget who wins in the end. When we go to the city of Rome what do we see? The ruins of the Rom Empire! When we go to Berlin, what do we see? The remains of Hitler's evil empire & the bunker where he committed suicide. We can actually buy pieces of the Berlin Wall, the very epitome of Marxist-Leninist attempts at world domination & the destruction of Xanity. X's kingdom always wins in the end!

But the question remains unanswered as to whether or not a final beast will arise before the final judgment, a beast who will be the sum total of all the others. This is why v 18 calls for wisdom. Recall that Jesus spoke of the course of this present age using the analogy of birth pains, indicating great travail would come immediately before the end. It is certainly possible that the Rom Emp of Jn's day is a foreshadowing of a horrible & final beast yet to come, a global geo-political emp which will persecute the ch in those days immediately before the return of JX when Satan is released from the abyss at the end of the thousand yrs, iwhich is the church age & which Paul describes in 2 Thess 2 as a time of wide-spread apostasy, characterized by Satanic deception & appearance of the man of lawlessness, the ultimate

AntiX, symbolically come back to life. But we need not fear the beast. For our victory over him is assured thru the bl of the Lamb. & while men worship the Dragon, & while the beast wages war on the saints, let us fight against these foes w/ the weapons God has given us– the Word of God & the gospel of God's grace. Instead of living in fear, let us sing the song of victory recorded in Rev 5:12-13,
"*Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power & wealth & wisdom & strength & honor & glory & praise!"*
"To him who sits on the throne & to the Lamb be praise & honor & glory & power, forever & ever!"

The Benediction "Now to you from Him Who is, and Who was, and Who is to come… from Jesus Christ, Who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead and the ruler of the kings of the earth. May Grace and Peace abound." Amen. (Rev. 1:4, 5)